

CANADA

## Vatican may be asked to repeal edicts on 'heathen' aboriginals

If aboriginal people refused the edicts, formed in the 1500s, the Vatican granted its envoys the authority to enslave and kill

by By Chinta Puxley, The Canadian Press Feb 10, 2015

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is weighing whether to ask the Vatican to repeal the Papal Bulls of Discovery that gave 15th-century explorers the right to conquer the New World and the "heathen" aboriginals that called it home.

Chair Murray Sinclair says the commission examining the impact of Canada's Indian residential schools is looking carefully at the 145 Catholic edicts as part of its final report.

Many argue the proclamations legitimized the treatment of aboriginal people as "less than human." Crown sovereignty in Canada can trace its roots to those papal bulls and neither Canada nor the United States has repudiated them, Sinclair said.

"The movement to repudiation is very strong and is moving ahead," Sinclair said in an interview. "If we as the commission are going to endorse it ... we have to come to a conclusion that it's necessary for reconciliation, to establish a proper relationship between and non-aboriginal people."

A growing chorus in Canada is calling on the Vatican to help begin a new relationship with aboriginal people on equal footing.

The discovery bulls, and others in the same vein that followed, gave Catholic explorers "full and free power, authority, and jurisdiction" and outlined their "duty to lead the peoples dwelling in those islands and countries to embrace the Christian religion."

If aboriginal people refused, the Vatican granted its envoys the authority to enslave and kill.

If the commission recommends the bulls be rescinded, Sinclair said, it has to weigh the legal implications, which could strike at the core of Crown sovereignty over land.

"What would be the basis for rationalizing Crown sovereignty if the Doctrine of Discovery is no longer available?" Sinclair said. "We have to ask that question and perhaps give some direction about how that relationship can be re-established in a proper way ... on a nation-to-nation basis."

The United Nations appointed a special rapporteur in 2009 who found the bulls lie "at the root of the violations of indigenous people's rights." The edicts have resulted in the "mass appropriation of the lands, territories, and resources of indigenous peoples," the UN found. They form the legal basis of many modern-day land claim disputes, it said.

Keith Matthews, former chief of Simpcw First Nation in British Columbia, has been quietly building support in Canada for their repeal. He has got the support of the Assembly of First Nations, which passed a resolution at its December meeting endorsing the revocation of the bulls.

It's about hitting the "reset button on our relationship," Matthews said.

"The papal bulls put us in a position no better than animals," he said. "We know better today. We're just as civilized and human as any other people in the world. It's really about righting a historic wrong."

"I'm no animal. I'm a person, a human being."

Hayden King, director of the Centre for Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University, said simply calling for the edicts to be repealed for reconciliation.

He said it would be more significant if the government recognized its sovereignty was based on a “fairy tale” that aboriginal people are further recognized aboriginal title to land.

“Unless there was corresponding action, it would seem kind of hollow.”

